

Educational Psychology in Practice

theory, research and practice in educational psychology

ISSN: 0266-7363 (Print) 1469-5839 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cepp20

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To cite this article: Naomi Boswell, Erica Douglas-Osborn, Taylor Halkyard & Kevin Woods (2021) Listening to children and young people: an Educational Psychology Service co-production journey, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 37:4, 396-412, DOI: [10.1080/02667363.2021.1975097](https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2021.1975097)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2021.1975097>



Published online: 24 Sep 2021.



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Listening to children and young people: an Educational Psychology Service co-production journey

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ABSTRACT

‘Co-production’ is advocated within UK legislation outlining children and young people’s right to be heard and to take part in the development of the services they use. This paper aims to explore understanding and knowledge around engaging with children and young people about how services can be co-produced within education. By using cycles of action and reflection, this research presents what children and young people think is important when working with, and receiving services from, educational psychologists, and explores the experiences of both children and young people, and educational psychologists, as they have worked and continue to work together to co-construct an educational psychology service.

KEYWORDS

Co-production; participation; children/young people; services; educational psychology

Introduction

Educational psychology and CYP engagement

Educational psychology practice is bound by the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice detailing that participatory methods should be embedded within practice (Department for Education [DfE], 2015). Research has further shown strong connections between the concept of participation and meaningful and effective client engagement (Burton et al., 2010; Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Often, an educational psychologist (EP) will act as a mediator between children and young people’s (CYPs’) wishes and what is possible within school settings (Burton et al., 2010). In addition to this, the importance of CYP having agency over their own lives is often considered and recommended by EPs (Mameli et al., 2019).

Current legislation stipulates that provision should be tailored around the needs of the child, with the child being at the heart of assessment and planning (White & Rae, 2016). Person-Centred Practice (PCP) is employed within education, health and care services as it recognises that CYP are themselves experts, and it is also a process which can build confidence in CYP whilst helping them to know what they want (Department for Children,

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Schools and Families [DCSF], 2010; Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2007; White & Rae, 2016). Despite this, children with SEND are often the least heard group of CYP (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Walmsley et al., 2018). Yet with the right tools, flexibility and support, CYP with SEND could be presented with opportunities to share valuable thoughts (Satchwell, 2018).

EPs generally do seek to obtain the views of the CYP they work with and ensure that these views are heard (Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Smillie & Newton, 2020). However, Harding and Atkinson's (2009) literature review roused concern over how often EPs commonly do 'to' children, or 'for' children, rather than working 'with' children (Burden, 1996). It is reported that EPs will often obtain the views of CYP on topics such as likes, dislikes, feelings, strengths, general information and school, and subsequently include this information in their written reports (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Yet it has been argued that some approaches and methods may merely promote the extraction of information rather than engage in meaningful dialogue (Tisdall, 2017). Giles and Rowley (2020) created a participatory research project with young people to create a film about how they wanted EPs to work with them. Disappointingly, however, whilst this information was extracted and EPs' discussions were recorded, no meaningful dialogue took place *between* EPs and young people, nor were EPs' responses fed back to young people.

Attempts are made to allow the voice of the child to be heard, yet it is argued that these attempts are often 'tokenistic', as thoughts and ideas from CYP rarely create change (Kilkelly et al., 2005). Practice is frequently defined by the actions of adults rather than CYP identifying their own concerns and solutions, with CYP being consulted later in the process and not being provided with feedback around decision-making (Tisdall, 2017). Participatory ethical and legal frameworks strive for services created 'by service users for service users', yet there is still no consensus on processes for such 'co-production' (Brandsen et al., 2018).

Co-production: what is it?

Service users within both public and private sectors are increasingly being invited to co-produce and/or co-create services and develop policy to ensure client satisfaction (Brandsen et al., 2018; HM Government, 2012; Needham, 2008; Osborne, 2018; Pestoff et al., 2012). CYP are being recognised as powerful contributors, with legislation stipulating the right of a child to participate and to be 'heard' on matters affecting them (Convention on the rights of the child, 1989). Co-production has been shown to positively impact CYP through development of social skills, whilst improving self-esteem and self-efficacy when they feel valued as 'trusted equals' (Mayer & McKenzie, 2017, p. 1186; Williams et al., 2010).

Within health services, the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) created key considerations and principles for engaging CYP in co-production in their 'INVOLVE' guidance paper (INVOLVE, 2016). These principles included building and developing relationships with CYP, sharing power, respecting and valuing all contributions and providing recognition for contributions (Dunn et al., 2018). In social care, where children's rights have been embedded within legislation since the early 2000s (Dixon et al., 2019), there has been a noticeable increase in co-production (Leonard et al., 2015; Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE], 2012). The English Government's Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of

Practice 2015 further supported this notion within education by making local authorities responsible for being advocates of person-centred planning, which puts the CYP's view at the forefront of the support they should receive (DfE, 2015). If a child is not listened to, this may lead to them feeling dissatisfied and frustrated (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan, 2015).

Prior to this study, an exploratory study was carried out to obtain the views of practitioners working with CYP around co-production and participation, particularly with CYP with SEND (Boswell et al., 2020, in press). The research indicated a lack of confidence from practitioners in this area about best practice and what participation and co-production might include (Boswell et al., 2020, in press). A further systematic literature review has looked at co-production in research and practice across education, health and care services and found that to date, there has been no known research exploring co-production in education (Boswell & Woods, 2021). This paper adopts a definition of co-production as *'an equal relationship between people who use services and the people responsible for services. [through which] they work together from design to delivery, sharing strategic decision-making about policies, as well as decisions around the best ways to deliver services'* (National Co-production Advisory Group, 2016, p. 2)

Focus of the present study

The areas of participation and co-production, what these include and their impact on professionals and CYP, are an underrepresented area in educational research (Boswell & Woods, 2021). An opportunity arose through a research commission by an EP with a keen interest in participation to support and evaluate a co-production project within an Educational Psychology Service (EPS). There has been no known research to date exploring the 'co-production' of an EPS with CYP and their families. The project aimed to provide a platform for CYP to share views on a particular EPS, to evaluate and reflect on their experiences of working with professionals, and to consider what they felt was important within services to support them. It was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do CYP wish to participate and share their ideas about their EPS?

RQ2: What do children and young people see as important when working with an EP?

RQ3: What do EPs see as the facilitators and barriers to working with the ideas of CYP with SEND?

RQ4: What is the impact for CYP and professionals in co-constructing an EPS?

Methodology

The research context

This research was commissioned by a local authority (LA) EPS, EPS A, in England and took place from July 2019 to July 2020. It is important to note that EPS A had gone through a period of substantial change, including the dissolution of the EPS, before beginning the

task of re-building the service. Therefore, this created an opportunity to 'start again' in building their model of service delivery with CYP and EPs were interested in engagement with CYP within their service. EPS A aimed to embed participatory practice and promote service user engagement throughout the service and practice, and had recently appointed an EP (EP A) with previous experience in developing services with CYP with SEND.

The current research aimed to explore the views of CYP, and to explore what co-production might mean to them. It is acknowledged that CYPs' ideas will not be homogenous but driven by their individual experiences, personalities, preferences and motivations. The research considered facilitators and barriers to co-production, along with the practicalities around implementation of CYPs' ideas. The context will always play a vital role within this kind of research as CYPs' views around their participation and the development of what they feel an EPS should include were also impacted by the LA processes and systems in which they lived. A critical realist perspective was adopted to consider such contextual factors whilst working to find solutions through engagement and explanation (Fletcher, 2017).

Action research to support collaboration

Action research aids collaboration by respecting potential uncertainty and the need for flexibility (Bradbury et al., 2019), whilst the action research cycle of 'plan-do-review' aligns with SEND professional practice (DfE, 2015). Over the academic year, the research aimed to develop a model of practice with the involvement of EPS A and CYP using the 12 stages of the RADIO model which provided structure (purpose and sequence) to actions (Timmins et al., 2003); additionally, Tripp's (2003) cycles of action research were considered throughout the process to support necessary reflective thinking (see Figure 1). Previous research has utilised the RADIO model to develop EP practice both within children's homes and Early Years settings over varying time periods (Douglas-Osborn, 2017; Lightfoot, 2013). Although the research was commissioned through EP A and EPS A management, participation in the research by all EPs was voluntary.

Encouragingly, all EPs within EPS A, and some from a linked, neighbouring EPS chose to take part ($n = 9$). CYP within the LA were invited to take part in the research, working collaboratively with the researcher and the EPS. CYP of varying age groups (7–19 years) and backgrounds were invited through a scoping email to a range of schools and organisations, and CYP were asked how they wanted to engage with the research and what they would like to focus upon. CYP from the Youth Council ($n = 16$), a primary school ($n = 4$), a secondary school ($n = 7$), a young parents group ($n = 2$) and a young carers group ($n = 12$) took part in either a focus group ($n = 25$) or drawing and mapping activities ($n = 16$). The first and second authors facilitated these activities by sharing example resources, as a basis for discussion, as requested by CYP. At least some of the CYP were assumed to have met with an EP but this was not part of inclusion criteria. Through discussion, each group, organisation or school that participated requested an Amazon voucher to acknowledge the time given and information provided.

RADIO Phases	RADIO Stages	RADIO Activities
Clarifying Concerns (Stages 1-4)	Awareness of need	Researcher and EP A discuss EPS A current engagement with CYP.
	Invitation to act	Researcher met with Commissioning EPS to determine investment and contracting of research. Written bid to Youth Council to establish interest. Meeting to Youth Council Subsequent meetings with a variety of CYP (Parents group, and Young Carers group).
	Identifying organisational and cultural Issues	Semi-structured Interviews held with initial key stakeholders around motivation, aspirations and interest for research.
	Identifying stakeholders in area of need	Presenting to Youth Council about the research. Emails to schools and services to recruit CYP (some identified by Youth Council). Meeting with EPS A to establish persons interested in research.
Research Methods (Stage 5-8)	Agreeing focus of concern	Meeting with EPS A to identify research aims. Interviews with stakeholders- Principle Educational Psychologist A (PEP A) and EP A. Meeting with Youth Council
	Negotiating framework for Information Gathering	Discussion with CYP about how they would like to be involved, the time they could give and methods to gather data.
	Gathering Information	Researcher and EP A met with CYP from different schools/ organisations to gather their views and ideas about their EPS on a platform of their choosing e.g. focus group, drawing.
	Processing information with research stakeholders	Views, thoughts and ideas from CYP co-ordinated into a summary document. A representative from Youth Council presented CYP ideas to EPS A. EPS A developed a working implementation document around a Voice of the Child strategy
Organisational Change (Stages 9-12)	Agreeing areas for future action	Discussions of CYP views, organisation need's and identifying areas for action
	Action planning	YP A and EPS A jointly decided on actions for the coming term.
	Implementation /action	Stakeholders facilitated change within the EPS
	Evaluating Action	Stakeholders (EPS A and YP A) reviewed actions each term and establishing further actions. Created a survey with the Youth Council for CYP to share how they wanted to be supported following Covid-19 lockdown. Individual interviews with EPs to evaluate co-production journey. EPS shared research journey with LA and create plan post research project finishing. Researcher and EPS A fed back to CYP in the authority about the research.

Figure 1. Co-production action research using RADIO model.

Data gathering and analysis

Data were gathered through a research diary and collecting the views of CYP and EPs via interviews, focus groups and drawing and mapping methods (see [Figure 2](#) detailing the research journey). Data gathered in the form of mind maps and pictures as dictated by CYP involved were analysed using content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013; Robson & McCarten, 2016). Repeated listening to the recordings allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the viewpoints and experiences of those involved and to select information most relevant to the process and their experiences around co-production (McLellan et al., 2003). Partial transcription was employed to analyse data from focus

Data Collection Methods	Those Involved	When	Data Analysis
Mapping and drawing	Youth Council (n=16)	August 2019	Content Analysis
		September 2019	
Focus Group	Young Parents (n=2)	August 2019	Content Analysis
	Secondary School A (n=7)	September 2019	
	Primary School A (n=4)	October 2019	
	Young Carers (n=12)	October 2019	
Semi-structured Interview	EP A	August 2019	Content Analysis
	PEP A	September 2019	
	YP A	July 2020	
Review Meeting (researcher diary)	EPS A YP A from Youth Council	September 2019 (n=8)	Content Analysis
		January 2020 (n=7)	
Review Meeting (researcher diary)	EPS A	May 2020 (n=6)	Content Analysis
		July 2020 (n=5)	
Review Meeting (researcher diary)	Youth Council	June 2020 (n=7)	Content Analysis
		July 2020 (n=9)	

Figure 2. Data gathering methods and analysis.

groups and individual interviews used as a tool to allow for easier management of the data whilst ensuring it was no less valid (McLellan et al., 2003). To remain true to the participatory themes of this research, an inductive approach to analysis was applied. This allowed themes and ideas to emerge from the data rather than being influenced by the researcher or theoretical frameworks (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Data were then subsequently integrated to produce a chronological account of the 'co-production journey', following which each dataset was revisited to check all analytic themes.

The co-production journey

It was important to consider the role of the researcher as facilitator and ensure the researcher was not responsible for the 'action'/changes but rather EPS A (Weiskopf & Laske, 1996). There is a balance to be struck between supporting research to facilitate change and being directive with participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). A clear factor in co-production is ensuring that it is sustainable over time. It was therefore important that the first author, as researcher and facilitator, provided support and a framework in which EPS A could take the lead in creating change for their service that would be sustainable and further develop after the research ended.

Initially, the research aimed to seek CYP views around co-production and engagement between them and the EPS. CYP worked with the first author and EP A to share their ideas around EPs and what was important when meeting professionals (see [Figure 2](#)). Some CYP had direct experience of working with an EP, while others learnt about what an EP did and based their judgement on previous experiences of meeting other professionals. The research journey adapted to the views of CYP and EPs and resulted in a number of joint meetings in which YP A, a representative decided by the Youth Council, and the EPs had opportunity to develop relationships, develop conceptualisations, hear, and in some cases, challenge each other's viewpoints. It was important that, where possible, power was equalised to all parties with appreciation of how relationships develop within real-life contexts (Lewis et al., 2019). Reflection was encouraged through questions in the review meetings, before and after research interviews with stakeholders and the researcher's own reflections on the process using a research diary.

For fidelity and comprehensibility, the authors present below the 'co-production journey' chronologically, detailing how the work developed and incorporating the changing views of stakeholders across stages.

Findings

Initial scoping of the research project

This research journey created reflections; from CYP about what they wanted from EPs, and from EPs about their personal practice. It also allowed for EPS A to consider how they engage with CYP and what their service model of delivery includes. For the researcher, it provided evidence around the power of listening to CYP, engaging them in research, and the facilitators and barriers to co-producing services.

Stage three of this action research identified organisational or cultural barriers to the activity. An initial meeting with EPS A opened up conversations with EPs bringing their own concerns about the research (Researcher Diary, 06.6.19); primarily how CYP's views can be incorporated in a way that is sustainable and integral to the service and EP practice. There were no established links between the EPS and CYP previously. A significant factor in the contracting of the research was identified as being leadership. Management's being present for the meeting signalled to the EPs that co-production was an important priority. Although the core values of co-production emphasise everyone having opportunity to share their views and have choice over their level of engagement, EPs expressed genuine interest in being involved in the research, notwithstanding encouragement by the management.

Children and young people: how they wished to participate and share their ideas

CYP highlighted the need for professionals to work flexibly using a range of data gathering methods, such as drawing, mind maps, and focus groups. This flexibility also extended to working with CYP outside of typical work hours, giving CYP information in advance about why you want to work with them and how you would feedback the impact of their involvement, and providing recognition for the contribution of their time.

Stage four of the research involved identifying potential stakeholders. The initial meeting with EPs and PEP A from EPS A allowed for identification of interested EPs to be involved in this work (Researcher Diary, 06.6.19). Although the researchers and EPS A wanted to work with CYP, gain their views and work on co-production, they were mindful that this may be a topic that was not of interest to CYP at all. A range of schools and organisations were contacted to see if CYP would be interested to meet with the researcher and EP A. A meeting with the head of the youth service was held to scope interest of the Youth Council and identify the process for contacting the Youth Council (Researcher Diary, 9.7.19). The researcher and EP A wrote an initial bid to be considered by the Youth Council, who then invited the researchers to a meeting where initial ideas were pitched (Researcher Diary, 19.8.19). The Youth Council decided they would be interested in engaging with the research and requested examples of how EPs practised currently so they could analyse these examples and share aspects they liked or did not like and use them as a basis for their ideas (Research Diary, 19.8.19). CYP requested to use paper, pens and post-its to think about their ideas in groups. They also recommended a number of schools and groups that may be interested in this work. When the researchers contacted the schools outlining the research, responses were positive, with a primary school, a secondary school, a Young Carers' group, a Young Parents' group and the Youth Council engaging with the research.

Some CYP chose to have verbal discussions with the first researcher and/or EP A but all were shown examples of resources (Focus Group, 30.8.19; Focus Group 16.9.19; Focus Group, 26.9.19). Following the gathering of CYP views, the Youth Council were asked how they would like these views to be communicated to the EPS or EPS A. CYP from the Youth Council were clear that they would like to share the views with EPS A in person as they considered it may have a bigger weighting in EPs' understandings about what is important to them. This led to an ongoing relationship between a representative (Young Person A) from the Youth Council and the EPS over the course of an academic year (Meeting 30.9.20; Meeting 23.01.20). The Youth Council nominated a representative to be involved who was both available to commit time and who also had previous experience of working with an EP (Interview 10.7.20). Later in the summer term, CYP from the Youth Council also co-created a survey with EPS A to ask CYP in the authority what support they would like as they returned to school in September following lockdown relating to the Covid-19 pandemic (Meeting 29.06.20).

Interestingly, some CYP commented that they did not feel comfortable taking payment for being involved in the research – 'we don't do this to get paid' (Researcher Diary, 19.8.19) – though they wanted to share their ideas and participate. Yet one young person commented that payment helped the group to feel 'respected' and that the researcher was 'appreciative of what people were giving' (Interview, 10.7.20). As previously noted, a voucher was allocated to each group or school that participated.

What do children and young people see as important when working with an EP?

CYP involved in this research shared a range of ideas about how EPs should work with them including how an EP introduces themselves, what they wear, how to publicise themselves online, and what feedback CYP would like following working with an EP. Insights shared below aim to demonstrate the range of ideas and comments made by different CYP, most of which were agreeable to other CYP taking part in the research.

CYP considered that they needed more information about the role of an EP and their local service. They described different ways this information should be publicised and shared with CYP through social media, for example, 'twitter would be a massive one' (Focus group, 1.10.19), others spoke of a 'welcome pack' (Focus group, 30.8.19) and about leaflets – 'send them out to schools' (Focus group, 16.9.19). CYP suggested that information about a school's EP be made accessible through assemblies about 'what is in an EP?' commenting 'they do it about young carers and bullying and stuff but I don't think this is a talked about enough subject in schools' (Focus Group, 1.10.19).

Requesting involvement from an EP was something about which CYPs had strong ideas. Many CYP shared that they felt CYP should have the option to self-refer (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19; Focus Group, 16.9.19; Focus Group 1.10.19; Focus group, 30.8.19). If this was not possible CYP felt that a meeting between the school, the child and family should take place in order to decide collaboratively if EP involvement was appropriate (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19; Focus group 30.8.19). CYP commented that without this in place it can lead to negative feelings about themselves or confusion from not being informed – 'maybe a bit there at the bottom to say "why do you think you have been referred to see me" so then you are addressing that straight away so people are not like "am I just weird?"' (Focus group, 30.8.19). CYP commented on feeling the need for more than one session with an EP 'Why would it be once? Like how do you tackle all of a child's problems in one session, you don't do you?' and another sharing 'I have sat and told people all your life's problems and then you never see them again and you are like ... what's the point in me even trying?' (Focus Group, 30.8.19).

Members of the Youth Council completed a mapping exercise whereby they detailed characteristics of an 'ideal visit with an EP' to make CYP feel easier about meetings (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19). 'Psychologist when you are a child is a scary thing I think' (Focus Group, 30.8.19). CYP commented on wanting to meet at a 'flexible time to the student', having 'comfy seats' in a 'inviting/welcoming room' and 'don't want them to see you writing notes whiles student speaks' but to have a 'recording device out of sight' (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19).

CYP spoke about the approach needed by an EP when working with a CYP which included 'wearing casual clothing' to be less intimidating (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19). Some CYP felt even the term 'educational psychologist' should be changed 'to something less formal' (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19). All CYP who took part liked the idea of EP having their own one-page profiles which are shared with CYP; having a separate one for older students and a more colourful one with pictures for younger students (Focus Group, 1.10.19). CYP felt this would help build rapport 'then you know more about the person, as a person rather than just what they do' (Focus Group, 16.9.19). Others thought publishing information about EPs online with more interactive methods of sharing information would be more accessible for CYP (Focus Group, 1.10.19).

A video of each person, with like what they do best and introducing yourself. Like on I'm a celebrity get me out of here, have you ever seen that? Well it comes up with their name at the bottom and like they tell you a bit about them. (Focus group, 1.10.10)

CYP considered that those seen by an EP should be actively involved in creating goals and actions for the future to 'help students achieve small aims' (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19):

Like 'what's your end goal of how many sessions you do with them, how do you want to feel at the end of it?' and I, to me, that was good because then when you look back at it you think I have actually got to where you said we were going to get to. (Focus Group, 30.8.19)

All CYP felt that it would be important for EPs to feedback to CYP about the work they had done, some preferring 'hand written note sent afterwards' and others wanting to be involved in action planning – 'I think it's important for the child to know what the action plan is for the future really' (Mapping and Drawing, 16.9.19; Focus Group, 30.8.19). All CYP felt it would be important for them to provide feedback about how they found working with an EP whether that is by going 'on an app' or in paper form following the meeting (Focus group, 30.8.19; Focus group, 1.10.19)

I think at the end for each child there should be like a page that you fill out about what you would change about your experience with us ... or what you have liked about what we've done or whether you feel like you got what you wanted out of it. (Focus Group, 30.8.19)

What do EPs see as the facilitators and barriers to working with the ideas of CYP with SEND?

EPs shared concerns around 'managing expectations' of the CYP they work with and about not being able to fulfil these expectations due to reliance on other systems around them, for example, school staff, SEND services within the LA (Researcher Diary, 06.6.19, Researcher Diary 23.7.20). EPs explained that, through consultation, they influence other agencies to 'see the value in [children's ideas]' but highlighted difficulty in being able to implement CYP's ideas if working within a more systemic service delivery rather than carrying out individual casework (Research Diary 23.7.20).

EPs questioned the extent to which the views obtained were representative of all CYP within the authority and considered opportunities to build relationships and seek feedback from CYP who have direct experience of working with an EP (Research Diary 23.7.20). EPs were concerned not to present as intimidating or negative in the meeting with just one CYP representative and felt that the process could have been improved by a group of CYP being present at the meeting (Research Diary 23.7.20). Regular meetings were reported as helpful in giving space for thinking, and EPs recognised that co-production and engagement with CYP was a 'process, we should be checking in with them regularly' (Researcher diary, 13.5.20). EPs saw importance in having an appointed individual to drive this agenda forward, facilitate interactions with CYP and to allocate regular slots to discuss this way of working, for example, in team meetings (Research Diary 30.9.19).

What is the impact for CYP and professionals in co-constructing an Educational Psychology Service?

Both CYP and EPs reported a positive impact of co-constructing an EPS, with CYP reporting feeling valued as their ideas were put into practice. Both parties discussed its contribution to personal development, with EPs appreciating time to reflect on their values and practice and CYP being able to challenge practice respectfully.

EPs reported that this research had offered an opportunity to question, for example, 'why aren't we doing more of that?', realising that 'the barriers become more evident so we can think about how to get round them' (Researcher diary 23.7.20). Changing viewpoints were evident during the co-production journey. Initially, for example, some EPs were concerned that one-page profiles could make boundaries unclear and perhaps set an expectation for longer term involvement (Researcher diary, 19.8.19). Interestingly, when reflecting on developments through the year, one EP reflected that they had 'completely changed [their] mind' and reported that the one-page profiles had a 'good impact', were part of regular practice and were 'sustainable' (Researcher Diary, 23.7.20).

EPs saw this work as being long term and were concerned about including the views of more CYP in the authority, commenting 'we need to make sure we are consulting with ... young people' (Researcher Diary, 23.7.20). In the final meeting, they discussed further how they provided feedback to CYP following consultations with school staff sharing 'that is something I'd like to think about more and I probably wouldn't have thought to do that without this' (Researcher Diary, 23.7.20). Sharing with schools the CYP survey results, which identified a wish for more mental health support following the return to school after the Covid-19 pandemic, was identified as a future action to support planning EP time allocation (Researcher Diary, 23.7.20).

CYP also spoke positively about the experience of co-constructing a service. A summary of the service developments in line with CYP views was fed back to all CYP involved in the initial view gathering, which was received positively – 'It's such a great feeling to see what we said in the meetings is in place now' (Researcher Diary, 27.7.20). However, YP A reported that she felt towards the end of the year there was a 'lack of clarity' around which actions had been acted upon during the pandemic (Interview, 10.7.20). This was later addressed at the final feedback meeting where CYP had opportunity to discuss the final actions for the research. When reflecting upon changes in working (carrying out meetings virtually), YP A felt meetings had previously been better when face to face and all together with EPS A, as it provided more opportunity for CYP to discuss what EPs proposed (Interview, 10.7.20).

YP A said that they found it 'admirable' and felt that EPs deserved 'a lot of credit for involving young people as a lot of professionals think they know best' (Interview, 10.7.20). They commented on EPs being one of the only professionals who 'if they say they are going to do it they do it' (Interview, 10.7.20). Beyond this, YP A felt that they had experienced their own 'personal development' by being involved in the research project, reporting that they had learnt 'how to challenge respectfully' (Interview, 10.7.20). YP A shared that they also felt comfortable to share their ideas because the EPs 'listened and given space to talk' (Interview, 10.7.20). YP A commented on being surprised at how EPs had 'had a laugh with her' and made efforts to build rapport, further commenting 'you don't build that relationship if you are an authoritative [sic. authoritarian/authority] figure' (Interview, 10.7.20).

Discussion

Summary of findings

The present study aimed to explore whether CYP were interested in co-producing an EPS service and if so, how they would like to do that. By exploring the views of CYP around what is important when working with EPs, EPS A was able to begin to develop their service in line with the views, needs and preferences of CYP. CYP views were gathered through a range of methods chosen by them including four focus groups and mapping/drawing methods. CYP chose to feed back their thoughts and ideas by nominating a representative who attended meetings with EPS A over the course of a year to discuss these ideas, decide on key actions and review them. Interviews were conducted with the EPS A PEP and EP A prior to the research beginning to explore motivations and hopes for the research itself. A final group meeting provided opportunity for the EPS A to reflect on the co-producing journey with CYP and a final interview with YP A allowed for discussion around the impact of co-producing from a CYP perspective.

Findings indicate some key considerations for professionals when thinking of co-producing with CYP. Time and resources were needed to pitch ideas to CYP and allow them to choose whether they were interested in engaging. Some CYP specifically commented on the importance of valuing their time through reimbursement. Methods for engaging with CYP and gathering their views needed to be flexible, for example, using drawing and focus groups, and meeting in the evenings. Findings supported co-production being a journey with evident barriers which included the following: getting other professionals and organisations to see the value in listening to CYP views, obtaining representative CYP views and building something sustainable. It was clear, however, that all involved within the co-production journey felt it was a positive experience and some actions implemented already had a positive impact, for example, one-page profiles. As a result, EPS A continue to commit to this journey beyond the research project, as they attend regular meetings with the Youth Council and EPs continue to have protected time to develop their service with further input from CYP.

Understanding co-production of service with children and young people

This research takes steps to better understand how an EPS can be developed through co-production, what supports it to be successful and factors that require consideration when working with CYP. It is believed there is little research to date exploring co-production with CYP within education services in comparison to the health and care services (Boswell & Woods, 2021). Perhaps, this derives from educational organisations traditionally approaching teaching as a ‘knowledge transmission’ endeavour, rather than favouring more inquiry-based learning environments (Chu et al., 2017; Johnson, 2010). It could be suggested, however, that education which facilitates CYP to be knowledgeable and empowered, to build the services they are a part of, and to support them to see their voice as both valuable and valid is essential to broader educational aims and democratic citizenship (United Nations [UN], 2001).

This research evidenced the need for co-production to be an ongoing process of consultation and service development. Co-production is not a destination but a journey of action and review with all stakeholders involved. For this to be possible, there is a need for stakeholders to be motivated and see value in this way of working. Challenges have to be acknowledged and everyone needs to take responsibility in practising this way. Developing a co-production culture has been identified as being key to co-production being successful and needs to be evident at all levels of an organisation (Boswell et al., in press). This idea was supported within the current paper with EPs identifying a need for other supporting systems to see the importance of this approach as well, for example, schools, other LA teams.

Implications for practice, further research and limitations

From the findings of this study, the authors propose five points to consider when embarking upon a co-production journey with CYP:

- (1) Co-production is a journey, not a destination.
- (2) Ensure, where possible, that the group of CYP with whom EPs engage is as representative of the population as possible.
- (3) Acknowledge the challenges and consider what may be useful compromises.
- (4) A key stakeholder will need to be identified for all to communicate with, and to facilitate the process, from both CYP and EPS.
- (5) Always feedback to CYP about what you did with their information, views and ideas.

Legislation has made it clear that co-production of services and engagement with CYP should be part of EP practice (DfE, 2015; Harding & Atkinson, 2009; Convention on the rights of the child, 1989). Despite there being an understanding that professionals should engage and where feasible co-produce with CYP, it is suggested that education professionals lack confidence in knowing how to co-produce with CYP (Boswell et al., in press). Potential conflict has also been identified in an EP's work being occasionally at odds with a CYP's views/wishes (relating to a CYP self-determination right), and the EP's broader opinion of the CYP's best interests (a protection right) (Schulze et al., 2018). It is possible that this may provide explanation, in part at least, for the slow advances made by EPSs to engage in co-production.

For co-production to be effective and successful, there is a highlighted need for resources, time, flexibility and investment, which have not perhaps been available due to the well-documented financial difficulties faced by organisations and services (Lee & Woods, 2017). This paper highlights a need for change and hopes to facilitate others to reflect on their practice either at an individual or service level about how they engage with CYP. Ideas are shared in this paper regarding what CYP think is important when working with an EP but the reader is reminded that they are just one group of CYP in one LA. It is hoped that EPs and their services will consider how they can begin to establish better links with their CYP and ask them how they feel that their service could work in relation to their context. It is acknowledged that for some agencies co-production may not be feasible due to the investment required (Boswell & Woods, 2021); however, efforts

should be made to involve CYP even when co-production is not achievable. This could include asking CYP how they would like to find out about the EPS or developing ways of seeking feedback from CYP about EP practice.

Finally, a tension brought to the surface within this research was the complexity of co-production and the importance of managing expectations when working with CYP. An example of this was that during the data gathering, CYP said that EPs should be called something less formal than 'educational psychologist'. Although this is not possible due to EP being a protected title, it does suggest a need for EPs to work towards neutralising the discomfort that this term might arouse or provoke (Birch et al., 2015). This could include dispelling any myths around what a psychologist is and is not for a CYP and demystifying the term itself.

Co-production with CYP within education is an under-researched area (Boswell & Woods, 2021), therefore highlighting a need for increased reporting on the process and outcomes of co-production endeavours to inform local developments. EPs, who hold professional responsibility but also knowledge in participatory methods and action research, could facilitate this through further research and through dissemination to educational settings.

This paper made steps to understand co-producing services with CYP but there are some limitations of the current research. Whilst it could be argued that many CYP may at some point require some involvement from an EP, it was not known how many of the CYP involved in this research had met an EP previously. Therefore, future research may want to focus more specifically on working with CYP with SEND.

Additionally, within this action research, further consideration might have been given to how CYP were contracted, should more CYP wish to be co-researchers. CYP along with EPS A were invited to read the full written paper to ensure data validation. If CYP were contracted as co-researchers, it could have allowed them to have more involvement in the writing and dissemination of the current study, and this perhaps would be a further area of research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This project was funded through England's Department for Education (DfE) National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) [ITEP award 2018].

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